

2011

Unveiled pandemonium

Christina Marie Johnson

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, cjoh173@lsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Christina Marie, "Unveiled pandemonium" (2011). *LSU Master's Theses*. 2332.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/2332

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

UNVEILED PANDEMONIUM

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

By
Christina M. Johnson
B.A., SUNY Potsdam, 2006
M.S.Ed., SUNY Potsdam, 2007

December 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Chris and Deborah Johnson for their ever-present patience, encouragement and support in all of my endeavors, but especially for their critique and commentary throughout the development of this series of work.

Warmest thanks to Denyce Celentano, Kelli Scott Kelley and Vincent Cellucci for the constant questions, challenges and insightful feedback.

I would like to thank Margaux Hymel, Courtney Barr and Phil Winfield for their technical assistance: from square one through all the bumps in the road and to the conclusion of this work. I appreciate all of your efforts on my behalf.

My sincerest thank-you and deepest regards to each member of my committee: Denyce Celentano, Kelli Scott Kelley, Courtney Barr, Gerald Bower, Mark Zucker and Vincent Cellucci. Each of you guided and encouraged me throughout, and I can't thank you enough.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
The Goddess.....	3
Capitalism and the Modern Goddess.....	5
Women and Sexuality.....	8
Shaping the Content.....	9
Process and Technique.....	20
Conclusion.....	24
Bibliography.....	25
Vita.....	26

ABSTRACT

Unveiled Pandemonium is a body of work that acknowledges my struggles, as a woman, with skewed self-perception and how frayed, decayed bits of self-love affect interaction with daily life: the public sphere versus the private. Using both large-scale graphite drawings and intimately sized, full-color digital narrative sequences, I portray movement, as a state of freedom, while capturing each character in a position of physical or emotional constraint. To increase the tension each figure interacts with another visually and in narrative; a war with the self begins. Within the engagement of internal and external tensions, each character's body becomes a battlefield as she strives to find self-fulfillment through uninhibited freedom from constraint.

This thesis briefly examines the perceived ancient ideal of womanhood and explores how capitalism has had a hand in the construction of the modern ideal of womanhood based upon the writings of John Berger, Carolyn Knapp and Jena Pincott. Lastly, this paper contextualizes *Unveiled Pandemonium* within the current art and ideas of Jenny Saville, Lisa Yuskavage, Katerina Jebb and Nan Goldin among others.

INTRODUCTION

Unveiled Pandemonium is a body of work that portrays the ways women attempt to achieve empowerment through the adoption of various roles, such as the striptease, the dominatrix, the professional and the innocent, and how this can affect self-perception. It acknowledges my own struggles with self-perception and empowerment. I found that some roles, although empowering to embrace, were powerful merely because they appear to be in opposition to social constraint. To embrace these roles meant shunning conventional social decorum, which forced me to contemplate the perception others had of me and the perception I had of myself, each leading to a distorted view of the self. The development of the work was influenced by researching historical and contemporary models of social and physical acceptability, femininity and an analysis of some contemporary artists who address femininity in their work.

Unveiled Pandemonium is created using both digital media and large-format drawings completed in graphite. The digitally rendered images are a full-color depiction of each woman within her private sphere. Each intimately scaled scenario captures a moment of personal panic or breakdown arranged in a sequential narrative like a constant, forward-reaching mechanism. Each position alludes to a different vantage point for the viewer who is spying upon a naked woman. She remains unaware of her voyeur and wrapped within her self-perception.

The second component of *Unveiled Pandemonium* is the body of large-format graphite drawings. At first glance, each woman is powerful through her monumental stature, and the largest drawing transitions from the private setting to a public sphere. The other characters seem to issue forth from her; facets of the same individual, multiple roles she either embraces or wants to embrace in her struggle for freedom. Light is used to investigate possibilities of the flesh and the visual interaction of internal discomfort with physical façade. Each character holds or wears items

indicating a location and a symbol of her constraint. The monuments begin to interact with each other in narrative. Each body position begins to play with the viewer's depth perception, and flesh spills forth in riposte to constraint.

John Berger asserted that the positioning and placement of the female nude within art was designed by men, for men and within a male world and that this became the language future generations adopted to portray women; how women ought to be viewed and displayed.¹ Berger uses contemporary media in comparisons to work dating as far back as the 16th century to solidify his belief that the language of the past is still the language of the present in how society portrays women. Although Berger's *Ways of Seeing* was first published in 1972, current memoirs, film characters and social biology documents show that Berger's ideas are visually represented throughout American culture today.

This thesis describes the ancient feminine ideal, the modern feminine ideal and the effects capitalism and media have on both self-perception and the formation of the feminine ideal. I will then outline instances of film and visual media that have further shaped the content and process of *Unveiled Pandemonium*.

¹ John, Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, New York: Penguin Books, 1973.

THE GODDESS

One of the oldest examples of female figural art is the *Venus of Willendorf* from circa 21,000-22,000 BCE.² She is composed in a manner that emphasizes fertility and regeneration: an exaggerated belly with a large navel, wide hips, strong legs and heavy breasts. A different, even older example of feminine figural art was found in the Czech Republic and carved from hematite: *Woman from Ostrava Petrkovice*, circa 23,000 BCE.³ This figure is striking and powerful in appearance; she was given strong legs that indicate forward movement, wide hips, an athletic midsection and less exaggerated breasts. Viewing the work, I have the impression that she was carved from life. The faience *Snake Goddess* or *Woman With Snakes*, found in Crete and created circa 1600 BCE, has a figure with a lush but strong physique. She is portrayed with full breasts with erect nipples, long, outstretched arms that are each firmly grasping a serpent, and wide hips.⁴ With eyes that glare at the viewer, she is clearly the one in command. Her attire and large headdress seem to give her a sense of prominence within her world.

As one moves through history, the goddess archetype shifted into something new, more dependent on external forces. Internal power is quashed in the process of attaining the proper presentation of physical form and beauty. Caroline Knapp begins a critique of the sleek, modern quashed Goddess women should aspire to, by illustrating that the shifting trends of form and fashion have turned:

...male fear to female fear; she makes us wary of our own flesh; she cloaks old suspicions in new clothes, an ancient ambivalence merely veiled in Versace and scented with Chanel. Look closely. The Goddess' shape—not an ounce of fat on it, nothing bulging or protruding or exceeding its limits—presents an ideal based above all on the need for containment, as though something dangerous or repulsive might break through if the female body were not carefully managed and controlled; her beauty—highly stylized, detached, youthful, often to the point of pre-pubescence—is constructed as something that's attained only by eradicating much of what is natural...⁵

² Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History*, Volume One, Second Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2002), 46.

³ Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History*, 46.

⁴ Reynold Higgins, *Minoan and Mycenaean Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1997), 16.

⁵ Carolyn Knapp, *Appetites: Why Women Want* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2003), 93.

This account brings emphasis to a loss of feminine power and places emphasis on the modern carefully cultivated form. By referencing girlhood and labeling it as a state of womanhood there is a loss of fertility, the ability to carry and sustain life: even her own.

CAPITALISM AND THE MODERN GODDESS

Capitalism is a mechanism that allows plastic ideas about feminine life and appearance to become culturally accepted norms. These norms are projected from parents to children, who absorb them at a deeper level. Whether at a conscious or unconscious level men and women are aware of these beliefs. As girls internalize these beliefs about body as expectations from parents, these beliefs also become a system of rights and wrongs in relation to the self.

By the time girls reach womanhood most will accept the state of womanhood as defined by media. She will understand that men believe in this propaganda, that to be accepted by other women, to compete with other women and to meet the expectations of her family she needs to conform to the standards set by the media goddess. As a woman she will remain indentured to this cycle, understanding it as a way of being and becoming.

There is a tremendous sense of freedom attached to purchasing products that make a woman feel or become closer to the modern ideal. This sense of satisfaction and empowerment permeates how one moves and interacts with the world on a daily basis. Yet, consumerism creates a division of self by equating products with self-completion. I tell myself, “I am not ready for the day unless...”—there are daily restrictions and bargains I make with myself in order to leave my home, all in direct connection to clothing, make-up, accessories, appearances.

Consumerism also fosters competition amongst other women. If I see a woman who has become the ideal, I ask, “How can I become...?” or “How can I outdo...?” John Berger states that “The spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, an envy which will then justify her loving herself.”⁶ Advertisements and publicity make frequent and direct connections to sexuality and lovability. This direct connection to lovability is a burden—if I can’t love myself, how can I expect another to love me? I must make myself lovable. Society has fostered

⁶ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 134.

and cultivated the self as a nemesis; pieces and parts of our own bodies must be isolated and eradicated. Society has manufactured products to do just that. The promotional campaigns of these products reinforce the need and provide the means of attaining perfection—and ultimately personal happiness and freedom. To seek out a product, to be enticed by the advertisement is to have a need, something that one lacks, and love, both of the self and from others, is forfeit.

If the body is the enemy and one is fighting the enemy, a war is waged. Griffith's translation of *The Art of War* reads, "Sun Tzu realized that war, 'a matter of vital importance to the state,' demanded study and analysis; his is the first known attempt to formulate a rational basis for the planning and conduct of military operations."⁷ Society has identified the enemy (tainted body), the weapons of destruction have been manufactured (products to eradicate the tainted flesh) and disseminated to the warriors (drugstore to bathroom for a small fee). A routine to effectively manufacture the socially acceptable self forms and the body's

...flows must be managed, its odors fended off, its weird hormonal irregularities minimized. Its pores must be masked, its lines erased, its unsightly hairs tweezed and electrolyzed and bleached. If the body has curves, they must be flattened; if it has bulges, they must be obliterated or concealed with special clothing; if anything jiggles or sags, it must be strapped down.⁸

Battle tactics must ensue—Carolyn Knapp, author of *Appetites: Why Women Want*, found solutions to 14 transgressions of the flesh alone.⁹ From childhood, I remember asking female relatives questions that pertained to appearances and receiving answers that, although innocent and to the point, clearly expressed expectations of the feminine: why do you wear make-up and why don't you leave the house without it on, why are you wearing that perfume, why do you dye your hair red when it's really gray? "I need to make myself look pretty. That one smells good on me and your father likes it. Because I'm 39 and holding." Many women load their homes with products that promise to inhibit the natural maturation, decay and deforming of the flesh; lotions, balms, creams,

⁷ Sun Tzu and Samuel B. Griffith (trans.), *The Art of War*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 10.

⁸ Carolyn Knapp, *Appetites: Why Women Want*, 93.

⁹ Carolyn Knapp, *Appetites: Why Women Want*, 94.

pastes, perfumes, body shapers, masks, and dyes, all purchased to use in conjunction with ab dollies, kettle balls, wrist and ankle weights, dumbbells, resistance bands, accessibly cheap workout videos and 300-calorie, 20-minutes-or-less diet cookbooks located adjacent to the 100-calorie “indulgence” snacks, with the hope that through constant and religiously consistent use a woman will be able to move freely out the door, into the light, into the public sphere. But how long does this emotional freedom last? For me, it’s about ten minutes.

Eat less, wear less, indulge less, be less—“less” realizes the full scope of the modern woman. The body does not betray one—the body overcomes one. Freud states, “...our losing is often a voluntary sacrifice...losing may also serve the purpose of defiance or self-punishment.”¹⁰ Ancient ideals of womanhood were reshaped into a modern, culturally acceptable condition; products are created and made accessible to achieve this standard. Advertisements inform the female consumer that she lacks something and has identified the remedy, while the consumer internalizes these perceived shortcomings and seeks out the tools with which to punish her body. Money and time are spent rectifying the distasteful hair color, the eye color that isn’t working, the facial asymmetry, the sagging breasts and other issues of the flesh. The female consumer voluntarily loses herself in her perceived shortcomings and the war she wages to rid herself of her flaws. The most frightening aspect of this is that even with the most extensive, up-to-the-moment product and how-to arsenal, she will still fail to measure up.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, trans, *Introductory Lectures On Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 106.

WOMEN AND SEXUALITY

A facet of acceptance and lovability is the idea that one is sought after and sexually appealing. The promotion and acceptance of the overly youthful, pre-pubescent form as an ideal is a loss of feminine sexuality. Devendra Singh, an evolutionary psychologist, conducted a body type study asking men

...of various races and ethnicities...to pick the most attractive female body type out of a series of line drawings, their universal first choice was the medium-weight figure...overweight and underweight women are more likely to develop health problems...just 10-15 percent below the normal body mass for your height—you may be temporarily infertile...Your womb shrinks, your periods dry up and your sex drive slows down...How sexy is that?¹¹

If men are visually more attracted to body types that are more ample than that of a supermodel, then why does pressure for extreme thinness continue? If a wisp-like figure results in a similarly gauged sex-drive, why do people find super-thin sexually appealing? Jena Pincott, a biologist and author of *Do Gentlemen Really Prefer Blondes?*, listed several reasons, but the one that intrigued me was, “Point to our desire to compete with other women, using anorexic women as a measuring stick.”¹² Biology errs on the side of good health, fertility and a healthy sexual appetite, but when it comes to fashion and the pleasing visual aesthetic of being, culture oversteps biology. The pursuit of acceptance and lovability based upon the parameters set by familial expectations, the media and men pushes women to tread upon themselves and one another.

¹¹ Jena Pincott, *Do Gentlemen Really Prefer Blondes? Bodies, Behavior and Brains—The Science Behind Sex, Love and Attraction* (New York: Delacourte Press, Bantam Dell Publishing, 2008), 100-102.

¹² Jena Pincott, *Do Gentlemen Really Prefer Blondes?*, 100.

SHAPING THE CONTENT

In shaping my own views towards the definition of femininity, I began analyzing the work of artists to whom I have been most drawn. I also began to study film, which puts thoughts and emotions into motion. The content of my drawn and digital art was informed in this manner.

Art—Film

Part of the intrigue of 1999's *American Beauty*, directed by Sam Mendes and written by Alan Ball, is the palpable tension, battles and violence within the home: between Lester and Carolyn, Carolyn and Jane, Jane and Angela, and Lester and his neighbor. Constant shouting, glass shattering, doors slamming, plans for breasts to be altered, a minor being molested, a gun being shot, characterize what is, from the outside, the example of a model white picket society home. Within each moment there is a transition in how one character views another. The most drastic changes seem to occur within Carolyn and Jane.

Carolyn is portrayed, on one hand, to appear utterly materialistic. On the other, she seeks perfection and success as a cultured, affluent woman, a real-estate agent and a homeowner, and tries to cultivate the perfect atmosphere for her insecure, mildly sarcastic daughter and seemingly emotionally devoid husband. Carolyn knows she is failing (via her emotional breakdown after a fruitless open house), and when she gives up on her home (herself) it is portrayed as a loss of her fidelity to her husband, a fissure within her home. The sex scene is an act of male-dominated penetration done to her, made very clear by body position and language; “Fuck me, Your Majesty,” seems to sound like, “Do this to me, you are better than me, I can’t control my life, you can control me.”

Part of the initial exploration of my work was to capture women in a variety of roles, both personal and professional. These starting goals remained as key components of all my large-scale thesis drawings. *Calculated Exposition*, the image below, is one of five drawings, and it portrays a woman with scraps of professional attire. There is a surreal quality to four of the five drawings, as

each woman is taken out of a more natural setting and left in various states of undress. *Calculated Exposition* is my characterization of a woman who is at a similar juncture in life to Carolyn. She is strained, attempting both poise and calm, but the physical tension in her position is apparent. The pen references the external, but also brings attention to the anonymity of the woman. She doesn't understand herself or her needs; how could she understand the outside world? The anonymity of the majority of my work allows the female viewer to imagine herself in this situation.



Figure 1: *Cultivated Exposition*

Jane, Carolyn's daughter in *American Beauty*, is portrayed as a sullen teenager. One of the first scenes of Jane is of her researching breast enhancement websites, and we later find that she has saved all of her babysitting money towards this cut, stuff and stitch operation. Jane's best friend, Angela seems to be desirable and placed upon a pedestal by both Jane and Jane's father, Lester. Angela is a model and clearly supposed to be more physically desirable than Jane, yet subjugates herself by bragging about sexual encounters with multiple men in which the sex act becomes an

obligation on Angela's part. Each scenario Angela describes is clearly an expectation from the man and performed in order for Angela to advance her career as a model. At the end of the film, the viewer realizes that Angela is lying about her sexual encounters and that she fantasizes about achieving self-satisfaction by walking through imagined minefields of male dominance. However, for two thirds of the film, each time Jane and Angela interact, Jane's body language is insecure and unsure. Angela becomes the measuring stick to what Jane seems to feel that she should be. One of the digital sequences that I have created as a part of my thesis show, called *Straw Woman*, is reminiscent of the sense of imperfection and driving ambition to manufacture the body one desires (Fig. 2). Here the woman is designed to look self-mutilated, but also reconstructed and pieced together. She is subjugated by the modern ideal of womanhood and by her own hand in attempting to achieve this ideal. Many of my digital pieces are set in a private space, which can be interpreted as both a literal private space and a mental space.



Figure 2: *Straw Woman*

American Beauty portrays its leading women in the manner that John Berger claims women have been portrayed for centuries. John Berger's statement, "a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and can not be done to her,"¹³ in itself could have a very positive connotation within contemporary art, but the way in which it is used visually describes

¹³ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 46.

Berger's survey of feminine subjugation in art.¹⁴ Each of the women, even the ideal Angela, is quashed: unsatisfied and left to lack.

Art—Painted

In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger refers to the portrayal of women in both old and contemporary art and printed media: "Her body is arranged in the way it is to display it to the man looking at the picture...made to appeal to his sexuality. It has nothing to do with her sexuality."¹⁵ Berger discusses the past traditions of European oil painting in rendering the female nude in relation to art and media contemporary to his book's publication in the early 1970s. I agree with Berger's assertion of how the positioning and placement of the female nude was designed by men, for men and within a male world and that this became the language future generations adopted in portraying women; how women ought to be used, viewed and displayed. Berger uses contemporary media in comparisons to work dated as far back as the 16th century to solidify his belief that the dialogue between the viewer and the work viewed exists today in presenting women.

By re-examining the aforementioned quote through the work of three contemporary women artists, this statement can be viewed in both a positive and a powerful manner. The women portrayed by Jenny Saville, Hanneline Rogeberg and Lisa Yuskavage have the ability to reject the needs of the male viewer to more fully express and realize their own needs. These women become full; they are not less, and they do not lack. The women portrayed in the paintings by Yuskavage, Saville and Rogeberg put aside the culturally accepted beliefs and expectations put upon them and find space to express their wants and dictate their own sense of the ideal modern woman.

Both Saville and Yuskavage use physical self-exploration, specific body-type and the rejection of a male presence in illustrating self-fulfillment that is not dependent on the gaze of a male viewer. The male viewer becomes a voyeur, not invited to participate in the self-fulfillment of

¹⁴ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 46.

¹⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 55.

the characters portrayed. Although Saville works primarily with oil paint, her photography collaboration with Glen Luchford, aptly labeled *Closed Contact*, can be interpreted in multiple ways with regard to Berger's assertions quoted above. The glass that appears to confine and constrain Saville works towards several ends (Fig. 3). The pane of glass assists in distorting and masking Saville's external self, allowing the physical identity Saville finds within and upon herself to become knowledge exclusive to her, and thus, internal. The glass also serves as a way to remind viewers that she is on display, yet inaccessible to them. Its use asserts the physical potential she has as she presses upon the glass, which acts as a wall of defense for the viewer. This action of pressing upon the glass allows Saville to assume control. The body becomes the painter's brush, which shows distinct directionality that pulls away from the viewer and allows the sheet of glass to become a canvas that Saville places and moves herself upon in the manner that she chooses—even the photographer has no choice but to take what Saville gives to him.



Figure 3: Jenny Saville and Glen Luchford, *Closed Contact* Series¹⁶

¹⁶ "Arcadja Auction Results," accessed on September 21, 2011, http://images.arcadja.com/saville_jenny-closed_contact~300~10528_20110608_NY030111_119.jpg

Yuskavage creates a menagerie of feminine characters that tease, provoke and unsettle the male viewer (Fig. 4). If we look at the physical features of each character, our attention is brought to their breasts, buttocks or vagina by physical exaggeration, color, self-gazing or hand and body position that alludes to masturbation. Many of the women have a distended belly. Physical aspects exclusive to a woman project into the viewer's space to provoke and titillate—the pelvis tips forward, breasts and chest push forward, their hands slip down panties, nipples are distended and prominent. The large, full belly becomes a symbol of inner fullness, which is not dependent on viewer interaction.



Figure 4: Lisa Yuskavage, *Half Family*¹⁷

In many of the paintings by Yuskavage the feminine gaze is not aimed at the viewer, but within her own world or at herself. The gratification and sexuality of these women are self-dictated and based upon self-explorations. The viewers, both male and female, become uninvited voyeurs, unable to engage with the characters depicted. The environments are also designed to suggest a feminine world—utilizing mostly interior settings, luscious fruits, sunrooms, sitting rooms, and

¹⁷ “Lisa Yuskavage,” *David Zwirner Gallery*, accessed on September 21, 2011, http://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/64/work_1935.htm.

candies. Even landscapes are seemingly closed gardens with pastel and candy-colored skylines, and clothing props are created with pieces of candy or clothing that references candy (i.e., candy-striped socks, textured sweaters mimicking frosting piping or fondant, etc.). The faces of these women are chubby and youthful, with large round eyes. Their hair is usually in long, wavy tresses, again stressing youth, innocence and vitality. Recently, some of the faces have been shown with whipped cream masking all but lips and eyes, pushing these characters to become tasty morsels. The appearance of candy colors and gumdrops reinforces the sense of youthful innocence about the figures. Male viewers are enticed to look at highly developed female bodies, only to find that they belong to young girls—not fully-grown women. Furthermore, men do not receive an invitation into the world of these characters, and as such, the voyeuristic aspect of the paintings becomes predatory. In these paintings, young women discover and enjoy their sexuality and fulfill their own needs, while simultaneously appealing to male sexuality without inviting men to participate in their activities.

Although the figural exaggeration in my work is not as pronounced as that of Lisa Yuskavage, some of the women I portray have fleshier bodies and a sense of inner fullness. These particular works are meant to be tentative explorations of the self and have a sense of innocence, while still exploring the possibilities of sexuality and femininity. Two of these works, titled *Assembled Onyx* and *The Flesh Micaceous* are illustrated below (Fig. 5). The woman in *Assembled Onyx* doesn't engage the viewer, but remains within her own experimentation.

Of the three artists discussed, Hanneline Rogeberg re-contextualizes Berger's statements in the most positive manner. She does not exclude the male participant; she assumes the leadership role within a sexual act or uses form and composition to emphasize the collective, unifying experience of being human. Rogeberg is very clear that a condition of a unifying or mutual experience is the reciprocation of caresses during a sexual act. *Bouquet*, *Balzac IV* and *Balzac V* are illustrated below in Fig. 6.



Figure 5: *Assembled Onyx* and *The Flesh Micaceous*

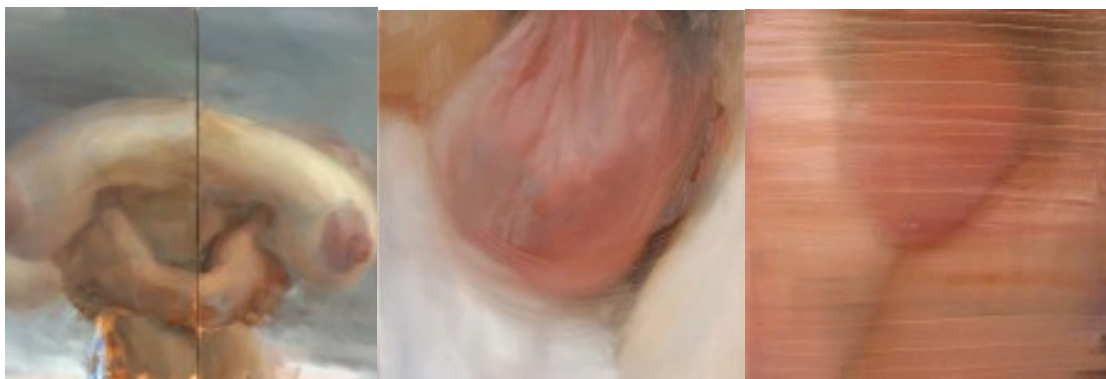


Figure 6: Hanneline Rogeberg, *Bouquet*, *Balzac IV*, *Balzac V*¹⁸

First, in *Bouquet*, Rogeberg turns pendulous breasts into a still life, seemingly objectifying a bodily facet of what characterizes a woman as a woman. Viewing the piece, initially, I felt like the hands nearly spear the breasts, but after staring at the painting I found the breasts to be physically full and heavy, restoring some of the regenerative quality to an aspect of the female form. These breasts are supported by several asexual hands and not given reference to a specific body. Although the dismemberment of breasts from body would seem extremely violent, one could also make the argument that this disallows them the ability to define a person. The hands are not distinctly made to resemble male or female hands—no manicured nails, no hair, not overly dainty, not calloused. These two aspects of the work allow the viewer to grasp at the unifying factor among men and women that lies outside of the painted surface—humanness.

In the second body of work—the *Balzac Series*—specifically, *Balzac IV* and *Balzac V*, Rogeberg explores a scrotum with some of the characteristic softness associated with women. The initial areas of painting utilize harder, more rigid and descriptive marks, while the top layers create a blurring of form and warming of temperature. The artist is asserting her need and power to explore the male portrayed, in the manner that she sees fit. In both, there is a body surrounding the scrotum, thus making it specific to a person, yet by excluding a specific identity, the painting becomes about her exploration of the male form, not the reaction of the male portrayed or the

¹⁸ “Images,” *Hanneline Rogeberg*, accessed on September 21, 2011, <http://hannelineroeberg.com/?cat=4&paged=2>.

sexuality of the male. This series allows Rogeberg to visually represent her actions upon a male body as the instigating participant and becomes a symbolic representation of the caresses she seeks in reciprocation. In *Balzac IV*, based upon the directionality of the mark making underneath, just as a man would handle a woman's breasts, she acts out these strokes on male genitals. In *Balzac V*, the form begins to resemble a human heart, again expressing the common bond of humanness, establishing equality between the needs of each gender.

While creating the digital portion of *Unveiled Pandemonium*, I engaged in experimentations to metamorphose feminine forms into other bodily structures. Instead of Rogeberg's emphasis on humanness, I show changes in orientation that allow a crouching, mutilated woman to be read as a fist. As the work developed, the environment also became an integral part of the metamorphosis. Illustrated below, is a digital sequence that is representative of the experimentation noted above in Fig. 6. The woman's body is partially draped by a sheet. There are no pauses between the stills of the sequence, allowing the body and sheets to expand and contract, as though in motion. The piece is titled *Arborization*.

By exploring and showcasing aspects of femininity and rejecting male participation in the worlds that these female figures inhabit, Saville, Yuskavage and Rogeberg are able to transcend the implicit negative meaning of John Berger's statements in *Ways of Seeing*. The characters are able to become self-fulfilled and express their needs through their own actions, a new way of moving forward.



Figure 7: *Arborization*

PROCESS AND TECHNIQUE

Several artists have influenced the decisions I have made regarding the processes and techniques of *Unveiled Pandemonium*. My work employs a variety of processes, and the artists I have been drawn to over the course of my thesis reflect this.

Nan Goldin's *Shapeshifting I*, displayed in Fig. 8, is a sequence of poses of a sitting, reclining and standing female nude. The identity of the woman and details of her body are obscured. The viewer only knows that there is a set of movements captured and the notion of a female form. That the viewer also has to be located at an intimate distance from the piece, and has to concentrate on what is happening to the woman behind a screen, lends a voyeuristic quality. The lack of identity and descriptive elements of the body intrigued me the most. The exclusion of the specific conveys a more broad statement of what is female, the feminine. Secondly, the sequential set of movements that were captured infer a narrative. The cropping and intimate scale of the work fed into the notion that this is a narrative. The viewer has to experience the scene, not from afar, but up close.

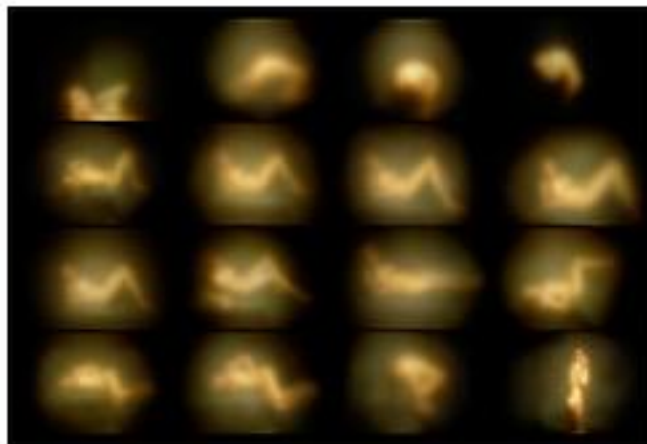


Figure 8: Nan Goldin, *Shapeshifting I*¹⁹

This specific work by Goldin inspired me to view my digital sequences as a film reel. Initially, I saw each individual piece as a separate narrative and created arrangements of the same sequence at

¹⁹ "Nan Goldin, Selected Works," Matthew Marks Gallery, accessed on September 21, 2011, <http://www.matthewmarks.com/artists/nan-goldin/selected-works/>.

varying scales, orientations and rotations. Later, I began to view the space in which they are to be installed in as the film reel itself. The viewer must stand up close to the image sequences and move through a series of tense and intense private moments as the woman I have portrayed struggles within her self.

Katerina Jebb's work, which was created from industrial-sized copy machines, has affected how I chose to manipulate several of the photos within each of the digital sequences and how I began to think of my large format drawings. Using a variety of textures, as well as dark, dramatic lighting, Jebb selectively flattens the body and examines it from a variety of angles. The textures seem to be feminine, but they are arranged in a way that encumbers the body and skews the perception of depth. The lighting forces high contrast, and the black background allows areas of the foreground to push and pull back and forth in space. In creating my digital work, I consciously chose images taken from a variety of angles. Some examine the figure from the side, others from the front, back, above and below. I created the textures using scans of fabrics, papers, lace and ribbons. I also took photos of fruits, houses, fish, water and flowers. Some of these textures are apparent in the digital work and some are not. To me, the textures relate to objects of femininity and sexuality. While it was important for me to design the work using these specific pieces of imagery, it is not necessary for the viewer to identify each occurrence of this imagery. Throughout the digital work, I pulled aspects of the textures forward and allowed them to be identifiable for the viewer. As for the large-format drawings, all but one remain devoid of a descriptive environment. They each have some objects alluding to a surrounding environment, but the lack of space allows the figures to come forward and to recede in space, based on the scale that I have drawn them. *Perpetuated Appetency* (Fig. 9) is one of the images where my use of gathered and created textures is apparent.



Figure 9: *Perpetuated Appetency*

In many of the performance pieces by Vanessa Beecroft from 2000 to present, the models she has chosen for each performance have a similar body type and purposely do not capture the viewer's gaze, despite staring outward. Many of the figures are arranged in a neutral environment and examined from a variety of points of view. These ideas lend to the anonymity that I was seeking within my own work and led me to ensure each of the images I chose for the digital sequences were within a similarly neutral space.

Antonio López García and Jenny Saville had the greatest impact on how I chose to draw within this series. López García is meticulous with detail, takes care in how he lays each mark and captures dramatic lighting within his still-life works. Looking at works such as *Home of Antonio López Torres* and *The Bathroom*, the viewer can tell that the scenes portrayed in the drawings have been studied from life and at length by the artist. The mundane is made dramatic through the use of light in López García's work. Jenny Saville's lavish use of paint, mark making and variety of textures also inspired my drawings. Within my own drawings I achieve a balance between looking and the meticulous (López García) with a sense of the lavish and carefree movement that Saville achieves with oil paint. Areas of the drawings are heavily laid in, while other areas of the surface and flesh are more thoroughly examined.

I have used a variety of process and media to create the works within *Unveiled Pandemonium*. Each of the artists that I've discussed has had a profound influence on the goals of my own work and established the framework for my own thinking in terms of process and technique.

CONCLUSION

Unveiled Pandemonium is a body of captured moments that display a war against the self in the attainment of self-fulfillment. Each character grapples with her internal chaos either publicly or privately. Her strides towards freedom are reached through her battles with constraint.

By the end of this series, I feel that the woman I have portrayed has begun to find her freedom. She seems to have found a way outside the limitations she had adopted and is taking her first steps forward.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin Putnam Books, 1973.
- Goldin, Nan. "Selected Works." Matthew Marks Gallery. Accessed on September 21, 2011.
<http://www.matthewmarks.com/artists/nan-goldin/selected-works/>
- Freud, Sigmund and James Strachey (trans), *Introductory Lectures On Psychoanalysis*. New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1973.
- Higgins, Reynold, *Minoan and Mycenaean Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1997.
- Knapp, Carolyn, *Appetites: Why Women Want*. New York: Counterpoint, Perseus Books Group, 2003.
- Pincott, Jena, *Do Gentlemen Really Prefer Blondes?: Bodies, Behavior, and Brains—The Science Behind Sex, Love and Attraction*. New York: Delacourte Press, Bantam Dell Publishing, 2008.
- Rogeborg, Hanneline. "Images." Accessed on September 21, 2011.
<http://hannelineroeberg.com/?cat=4&paged=2>
- Saville, Jenny and Glen Luchford. Closed Contact. "Arcadja Auction Results." Accessed on September 21, 2011. http://images.arcadja.com/saville_jennyclosed_contact~300~10528_20110608_NY030111_119.jpg
- Stokstad, Marilyn, *Art History*, Volume One, Second Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2002.
- Tzu, Sun and Samuel B. Griffith (trans), *The Art of War*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Yuskavage, Lisa. David Zwirner Gallery. Accessed on September 21, 2011.
http://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/64/work_1935.htm.

VITA

Christina Johnson was born in Johnstown, New York, a small town outside of Albany, New York. The State University of New York in Potsdam awarded Christina her Bachelor of Art in Studio Art and she earned her State of New York Teaching Certification in the Area of Art in May of 2006. She continued her education in Potsdam, completing a research thesis pertaining to the integration of the arts into the regular classroom setting. She was awarded her Master of Science in Education for the area of curriculum and instruction in the August of 2007. After working in the field of teaching and continuing her creative practice for just over a year, Christina decided to prepare a portfolio and pursue a Master of Fine Arts. At the recommendation of a respected mentor, she applied and was accepted to the Graduate Painting and Drawing Program at Louisiana State University for the Fall 2009 semester. Christina will complete this course of study in December of 2011.